



# Catch Wave

## Planning Handbook



South Dakota Transition to Adulthood  
Systems Change Project  
Spring 2000

# CATCH THE WAVE PLANNING HANDBOOK



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## Introduction:

*Catch the Wave* was developed to assist high school students to determine if post-secondary education is an appropriate personal goal and to provide them with key information on the differences between high school and post high school educational settings. *Catch the Wave* offers information to students with disabilities in high school considering a post-secondary option, their parents, and educators.

Planning for any conference is typically a labor of love. Conference planners are always trying to find more effective ways of planning and conducting their event. This handbook will provide information on how to plan, organize and conduct *Catch the Wave*, a conference for freshman/sophomore high school students who are considering attending post secondary educational options following graduation. As with any conference, the greater part of the work is done by pre-conference planning and organization. This chapter will assist the planner in planning to conduct, *Catch the Wave* by offering a comprehensive list of topics and planning suggestions to be addressed during this phase.

*Catch the Wave* was developed and designed through a series of meetings supported by the SD Transition to Adulthood Systems Change Project. During the 1997-98 school year, several post secondary settings hosted this event. Through the efforts of these pioneers the handbook that follows was created. Special thanks and unending gratitude to Elaine Pearson, John Hirschman, Francine Campone, Trudee Schur-Marsh, and Mary Ann Slanina!

## CHAPTER 1 - GETTING STARTED



### Identifying a Planning Team

Planning a successful student conference requires a great deal of pre-planning and marketing! It is suggested that a Planning Team be identified to handle these pre-conference activities. The Planning Team should be comprised of the Disability Service Coordinator from a post secondary setting; local middle or high school staff; students or young adults with disabilities - preferably students currently enrolled and successful at a post secondary setting; parents; anyone else who is interested! A pre-conference planning meeting is the starting point for a meaningful conference. Ideally this meeting will be held **three to four months** before the anticipated conference date.

A *Catch the Wave* Planning Worksheet has been developed as a guide and is located in the Appendix pages 1-2. This worksheet will assist the conference planning team to identify the areas that need to be addressed at the first meeting, and at subsequent meetings. It is suggested that the committee designate one person on the Planning Team to be the "Team Leader." It will be this person's responsibility to oversee the overall organization of the conference. Another committee member should be assigned the responsibility for managing the registration process for *Catch the Wave* since this can be a time-consuming process.

### Choosing Conference Starting/Ending Times

Equally important is determining the starting and ending times of the conference. If the conference begins too early, participants who must travel long distances may miss the beginning of the conference. Extending the conference past 2:00 PM may disrupt transportation arrangements if students must return to school after the conference. The Planning Team will need to discuss these issues when determining the time frame/agenda for *Catch the Wave*.



*TIP: A fast-paced schedule will keep the students' attention, while at the same time making the most of the time allotted for the conference.*

### Choosing a Date

Choosing an appropriate date for *Catch the Wave* can be a challenge. The conference will need to be timed so that it does not conflict with other school activities, in-service and off-school days in both the secondary and post-secondary settings.

*What are the advantages and disadvantages  
of conducting **Catch the Wave** during a post-secondary school break  
or weekend day?*

#### ADVANTAGE

- Participants have the campus to themselves.

#### DISADVANTAGE

- Participants miss the chance to observe campus activities.



- More classrooms are available for breakout sessions.
- Food service available for lunch.
- Site cafeteria may be the largest room available for large group sessions.
- Parking is readily available.
- Foot traffic would be light during campus tours.
- Participants do NOT see actual classes in progress.
- Food service may be closed or not available for meals and beverages.
- Cafeteria not available for exclusive use of conference participants.
- Parking can be difficult to find.
- Many classrooms/other campus locations could be closed.

The Planning Team will need to coordinate local event calendars to identify possible dates. Scheduling for the middle/end of the week has been found to be successful, but it can be more difficult for parents to attend. Scheduling ***Catch the Wave*** on a weekend day can increase parent attendance, but the participation of educators and other professionals may decrease. Sometimes the calendar of the conference site dictates the schedule date of ***Catch the Wave***.

### Site Selection

A primary goal of ***Catch the Wave*** is to give local high school students with disabilities the experience of being on a post-secondary campus. For this reason, a technical institute or university is the appropriate setting for this conference.

The ideal site will have a large meeting room that can accommodate from 40 to 75 participants, with several adjoining smaller meeting rooms to accommodate three to four small groups with about 10 to 20 members to a group. A cafeteria/classrooms combination works well for this type of conference.

Plan to include a "walk-through" inspection as part of the preliminary visit to the prospective conference site. Use the ***Catch the Wave*** Site Checklist and the Site Accessibility Checklist located on pages 3-5 in the Appendix, to identify potential accessibility problems. Pay special attention to stairs and elevators and determine if the elevators can accommodate the expected number of participants using wheelchairs. Try to anticipate the routes the participants will use to access the classroom for the small group sessions.

A prospective conference site must provide accessibility for all disabled participants. "Accessibility" can mean different things to different people. For example, holding all conference activities on one floor may be ideal for a group of participants using wheel-chairs, but the glare from lighting may interfere with comprehension and/or concentration for those using interpreter services.

### Facilities

Careful consideration should be given to the proposed use of site facilities. The Planning Team may want to develop a diagram of the prospective site to use to schedule, predict, and plan. If a large number of participants are expected it may be advisable to draw a number of possible configurations of tables and chairs to give a rough estimate of how the group can be accommodated. Take into consideration the space requirements of participants using wheelchairs and speaker/panel placement in the room to ensure that all participants can hear and see the speakers. Remember that some of the participants may be requiring interpreter services or other accommodations for participation.



Try to avoid the need to change the table and chair configuration for different activities during the conference, this interrupts the timing of the conference and crowd movements.

## **Planning the Agenda**

### **Format of Conference**

Once the date, time, and site location have been selected, the conference agenda must be discussed; a sample agenda is located in the Appendix on page 6. There may be some slight variations in the agenda depending on the needs of the student participants, the availability of selected presenters, and the availability of workshop breakout rooms.

**Catch the Wave** should begin with some brief opening comments by a member of the Planning Team that identifies the conference objectives and provides a general orientation to the conference agenda and site. Following the opening remarks, a general session of either a student panel or a keynote speaker is recommended. This first event sets the tone for remainder of the conference and it is critical that the Planning Team gives careful consideration as to who and what is scheduled during this time. After the general session there are several breakout sessions scheduled. **Catch the Wave** is designed to provide information at several different levels, i.e. prospective post-secondary students, parents, educators, and others involved in planning transition to post-secondary. The agenda should specify the target audience for each session. The content for the sessions may be similar for each group, but the instructors and methods will differ. Training locations should be clearly identified for each group. Pages 8-10 in the Appendix have examples and descriptions of breakout sessions.

Each breakout session should be 45 to 50 minutes in length with a short 5-10 minute break between sessions. This time frame allows time for workshop presenters to disseminate their information and hold the attention of the participants.

It is suggested that a post-secondary student with a disability do the breakout sessions targeted for high school students and all session presenters should be encouraged to include a post-secondary student as a co-presenter. Breakout session presenters should utilize a variety of "styles" during their presentation to encourage audience participation and interaction.

Include time for LUNCH in the agenda. It is recommended that lunch be provided to participants on site in conjunction with an Informational Fair. The Planning Team should

work with the food service at the site location or contract with another vendor to provide a simple meal to conference participants. The cost of the lunch should be factored into the small fee charged in association with this event.



***TIP:** Schedule breakout sessions more than once. Participants appreciate a second chance to hear a topic they may have missed.*

### **Student Panel Presentation**

The Student Panel Presentation has been consistently rated a highlight from past participants at **Catch the Wave**. The student panel consists of current or recent graduates from a university or



technical institute who has successfully transitioned from high school to a post-secondary setting. Sharing their "stories" with prospective post-secondary students adds a perspective that benefits the student and other conference participants. This activity sends a strong message to participants and it is recommended that this event follow some brief opening statements by one of the conference organizers or post secondary administrator and replace the keynote speaker OR occur following lunch/Information Fair and replace a breakout session. ***Catch the Wave*** student panels are typically comprised of five students with differing disabilities, career goals, and genders. Since a large number of students in the audience have "hidden disabilities", particularly LD and ADD/ADHD, the relevance and effectiveness of the panel members' stories is enhanced if a number of panelists also have hidden disabilities.



***TIP:** Clear communication with the panelists before the conference is necessary to clarify expectations. Most student panel members are unaccustomed to public speaking. Include a series of topics for discussion in the confirmation letter to give them time to prepare their presentation and formulate answers to questions. An example of topics and questions for panel presenters is located in the Appendix on Page 14.*

It is suggested that a member of the Planning Team conduct a "pre-presentation briefing" for the student panel members. This can occur before the day of the conference, or 30 - 45 minutes before the panel presentation begins. The panelists need to be briefed on the ground rules; this also provides visually-impaired panel participants the opportunity to become familiar with the sound of other panel members' voices. The following topics should be addressed in the briefing: Introduce the panel members to each other. Describe the panel format. Establish who is to speak first, next, etc.

- Emphasize the need to stay within the time allocated to each panel member.
- Demonstrate the signal the moderator will use to indicate that time is up.

The briefing session may be used to hear panel participants answer the pre-determined questions. It is not necessary to walk through each question, but to be assured panel participants reflect the message you would like to convey, it is best to be aware of how the students on the panel stand on the following issues:

- use of accommodations
- use of the Disability Services office
- relationship with Disability Services office
- challenges they've encountered and how they've addressed them
- value of self-advocacy

The panel participants should be assembled on the stage before calling the conference to order. The panel moderator should inform the audience at the beginning of the presentation that their will be addressed after all the speakers have presented.



The Student Panel should be scheduled for 40-50 minutes in length. Each panelist will share his or her story for 5 minutes without interruption. After each panel member has had the opportunity to speak, the moderator should ask questions to the group or individually. These questions should reinforce previously given information on topics or ensure a topic is addressed. Questions can be taken from the audience and are directed either to individual panelists or to the group as a whole.

A moderator or chairperson who is not a member of the panel facilitates the panel event. The moderator's role includes:

- controlling time by giving clear signals to panelists.
- asking questions of panel or individual members.
- calling on an audience member who wishes to pose a question to the student panel.
- directing questions to the appropriate panel member.



***TIP:** Often a good question won't get asked because a participant is too shy to speak before a large group. Provide 3 x 5 index cards for participants to write down questions while the student panel is speaking. Have someone collect the cards and pass them to the moderator, who screens the questions before relaying them to the panel.*

### **The Keynote/Opening Speaker**

The Planning Team may choose to utilize a speaker for the opening session as a keynote. A keynote or opening speaker will set the tone of the conference.

The Planning Team member should work with the keynote or opening speaker to ensure that these remarks complement the overall theme of ***Catch the Wave*** and provide inspiration and determination to the participants. Possible keynote topic suggestions include:

- Connect Your Interests and Skills with Career Opportunities
- Take Charge of Your Life!
- Make Choices to Prepare You for Your Future
- Self-Advocacy - Become Your Own Expert!

### **The Information Fair Format**

The Planning Team may decide to offer an Information Fair during the lunch break. The Information Fair will provide resource information on adult services providers and post-secondary educational program options. Information will be offered on eligibility requirements and services that will assist high school students to plan for post-secondary programming.

To conduct an Information Fair it is suggested that tables be arranged around the perimeter of the lunchroom. Offering the Information Fair during the lunch break maximizes the best use of time in an already-strict schedule, provides participants with concrete materials, and encourages





interactions between participants and providers. Page 7 in the Appendix provides a general listing of agencies and programs that should participate in the Information Fair.

## Selecting Panel Participants and Speakers

### **Q** *How to Select Panel Participants?*

- Recruit panelists through Disability Services Coordinators.
- Prospective panelist should have knowledge of their disability and feel comfortable speaking of it in front of others.
- Panelist should be a current student or recent graduate.
- Panelist should have good self-advocacy skills.

### **Q** *What to look for in a speaker?*

- Thorough knowledge of subject material
- Able to deliver a positive and uplifting message.
- Engages audience.
- Avoids "talking down" to students.

### **Q** *Where do you find speakers?*

#### **Co-Workers and Colleagues**

Faculty members, members of professional organizations, other educators.

#### **Campus Disability Services**

Student panelists may be recruited through the Disability Services office at the local university or technical institute. This can also be the first point of contact for the Information Fair component.

#### **Adult Service Providers/Community Agencies**

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services; Service to the Blind and Visually Impaired; Centers for Independent Living; Learning Disability Association; Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities.

#### **Personal Contacts**

Maintain a personal card file describing speakers heard at meetings, conferences, conventions and workshops. List the name affiliation, event where he/she spoke and describe their ability as a speaker. Also make note of comments heard about potential speakers.

Prospective speakers for breakout sessions, Information Fair presenters, and student panel participants should be contacted by telephone. Give them a brief outline of the purpose of the conference, and ask them if they would consider conducting a workshop session (or participating in the information fair, etc.). The following is a list of some of the information needed by prospective speakers:

- Purpose of the conference.



- Size and pertinent demographics of the audience.
- Conference site and date.
- Time the speaker is scheduled to present.
- Confirmation of speaker's topic.
- Length of time scheduled for speaker's presentation.
- Whether expenses are covered.
- The value of using a presentation style that will engage the audience.
- Space available for displays (for Information Fair).

Once a speaker or presenter has agreed to participate, follow up with a confirmation letter. Sample speaker confirmation letters are in the Appendix on pages 11-13. The sample letters address a workshop session presenter, an information fair presenter, and a panel presenter. Include a map to the conference site and a conference agenda with the confirmation letter.

Book speakers early. Confirm speakers at least one to two months before the conference date. Schedules tend to fill up fast! As soon as breakout session presenters have been selected and confirmed, they should be assigned a room from the block of workshop breakout rooms reserved at the conference site. A Workshop Room Directory should be created and included in the packets that participants will receive at the conference.

### **Food and Beverage**

Although not a requirement, offering refreshments before and during the conference, in addition to lunch, contributes to a warm and welcoming atmosphere.

As conferences typically run on a tight time schedule and a limited budget, food services provided by the site hosting the conference greatly simplify this process. Food services at the university or technical institute can provide a time- and cost-saving alternative to a catering service, either in the form of a sack lunch or a self-serving buffet. If there is a "meal service program" at the campus site it becomes a side benefit to use this and allow the students the opportunity to see a "program" in action.

Other options include an actual break for lunch, but this option takes time away from conference sessions and not all participants will return on time. Participants could be requested to bring a meal, but this is problematic for obvious reasons. Therefore, providing a light lunch is strongly advised. It is recommended that the Planning Team charge a small registration fee to participant for lunch/refreshments and cost of materials. More information on fees will be provided in the section on registration.

Other possible factors to consider when determining registration fee are whether there is a room rental charge, custodial set-up/clean-up charges.

### **Marketing Activities for Catch the Wave**

People cannot register for the conference if they do not know about it. By building interest beforehand, the stage is set for a strong attendance. Marketing for *Catch the Wave* can include dissemination of a flyer that contains registration information, articles in newsletters or local



papers, public service announcements, phone calls, and posting the information on relevant www sites. Typically a flyer with registration information is one of the primary promotional material of the event. The following information should be provided with any *Catch the Wave* marketing activities:

- Time, date and location prominently featured.
- Information on who should attend.
- Program highlights.
- Benefits of attending the conference.
- A registration form with instructions.
- Information on registration fees and acceptable methods of payment.
- Registration deadline and information on cancellations.
- Contact information for accommodation request or for general questions.
- Speakers or workshop presenters scheduled to participate, or workshop topics.

Be sure to review any marketing flyers or materials to ensure that the value of the information provided to participants is highlighted. Early registration should be encouraged and participants who may need any special accommodations to participate need to know who and when to contact for these arrangements. The conference includes a variety of topics tailored to specific participant groups.

Concurrent with regular promotional materials, consider using one or all of the following marketing strategies:

- Fax a short newsletter article featuring information on the conference to prospective attendees.
- If your conference features speakers who are recognized by some of the participants, be sure to include their name(s) in any promotional materials.
- Don't overlook the media! Placing an article in local papers is an excellent way to advertise the conference.
- Utilize your contacts at local high schools. Accompany all mailed or faxed promotional materials with phone contacts, enlisting their support in contacting students and parents.
- Using Public Service Announcements over radio and television.

Providing a liberal cancellation and refund policy encourages prospective participants to sign up immediately. *Catch the Wave* promotional materials should provide clear information on cancellations and/or refunds. For example:

- A notice of cancellation at least five business days prior to the conference will result in a refund of the registration fee.
- A "no-show" on conference day cannot be granted a refund.

A provision allowing the cancellation of the entire conference in case registrations are insufficient to justify the expenses involved in organizing the conference should also be included as part of the cancellation policy. The following standard statement is typically used:



"If conference enrollment is insufficient, registered participants will be notified no later than ---, and a complete refund will be issued."

Expenses may have already been incurred in organizing the conference at the time the decision is made to cancel the conference. Be aware that there may still be financial responsibility towards these commitments, which must be absorbed. The Planning Team should discuss what financial arrangements would be made in the event the conference is canceled.

## **Registration**

### **Advance Registration**

Advance registration (or "pre-registration") benefits any conference planner. The obvious benefit of advance registration is that it provides information on the number of participants to expect. This information will provide the planning team with information on numbers for food service, room assignments for breakout sessions, and the layout for the larger group events. Arrangements for any accommodation requests can be completed.

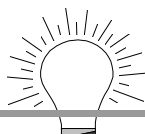
Advance registrations should be acknowledged through a confirmation packet. This packet of information can include a letter that acknowledges any accommodation requests, provides a campus map with directions to the conference site and parking instructions. If a school district is registering several participants, this packet of information can be sent to the teacher for all of the registered students. A blank registration confirmation letter is on page 15 in the Appendix. Be sure to repeat the cancellation/refund information on the registration confirmation letter.

### **Registration Management**

An efficient registration system is the heart of the conference process. There are three basic types of registered participants: the pre-registered participant - turns in form and payment PRIOR to conference; phone/other registration - individual phones or provides names/numbers of participants and promises payment on conference day; walk-in registration - shows up without prior notice and may or may not pay fee on conference day. Accepting a phone/other registration can present a risk. Very often, this type of participant will either be a "no-show", or the group in attendance will be smaller than the original count given. This presents a problem if "anticipated" attendees are included in the final lunch count. Once the commitment is made to provide food/beverage for a definite number of participants, the provider will most likely expect to be paid for that number regardless of a lower final attendee count. To sidestep potential problems, holding spaces for interested conference participants is generally not recommended. Walk-in participants pose similar logistical problems - room set up would need to be adjusted and food service preparation would not be adequate to accommodate unplanned arrivals. It is recommended that some final notification date be placed on the marketing flyer to avoid the above difficulties.

Conference and registration management can generate a great deal of paperwork and correspondence. The Planning Team will need to identify the specific responsibilities for the team member assigned to handle registration. If the team decides that some form of registration confirmation will be sent out, it is recommended that the information be computerized so that revisions, additions and status notations can be easily updated and multiple copies of the master registration list may be readily produced. As an alternative, regular 3 x 5 index cards can be used to keep track of conference participants. Different color index cards can be used if needed to help distinguish different categories (student, parent, educator, other, etc.).

It is also recommended that a billing system be in place before conference day. The billing system





must be designed to handle registration purchase orders that need to be invoiced after the conference, as well as to bill any participant who had not paid the registration fee as of the conference day.

*Tip Alert: When accepting registrations from school groups, request individual names at the time of registration. It is difficult to keep track of "twelve students, seven parents and two educators from X High School" arriving at different times on the day of the event.*

### **Conference Fees**

The Planning Team will need to determine how much to charge participants to attend ***Catch the Wave***. A small fee of \$3 to \$5 dollars is recommended. The decision on how much to charge will be based on preliminary figures of how much food and materials will cost. The Planning Team should not set a figure too high as that may discourage some individuals from attending.

### **Helping Participants to get the MOST from *Catch the Wave*!**

Most conference participants are looking for new ideas and information. Prepare participants before the conference for long-range planning by asking them in the registration confirmation letter to think about what they expect to get out of the conference.

For educators...

- Throughout the conference, encourage participants to discuss how they will report new information to colleagues.
- Prepare a take-home packet of resource materials to be shared with colleagues.

For parents...

- Encourage parents to discuss conference information with their son or daughter.
- Parents and their student attend different workshops, parents should take advantage of the workshops offered just for them.

For students...

- Encourage student participants to keep conference materials in their folder, including notes on conference activities.
- Motivate students from the beginning of the program to actively participate by asking questions in the workshops.

### **Audio/Visual Equipment**

Technology plays a big part in any student's life, and this can be especially true for students with disabilities, particularly mobility-impaired students. A student conference is a great opportunity to showcase the latest adaptive technology. The Planning Team should request the presenters notify them with any equipment needs for their presentation.

### **Conference Signs**

Signs posted in strategic locations contribute to good conference organization. Use signs wherever possible to prevent intrusion or eliminate confusion - outdoors and indoors, both en route and at the conference site.

It is especially important that the route from the morning general session area to the workshop breakout rooms is appropriately marked. Place large signs along the route to the workshop breakout rooms. If possible, try to post volunteers at entryways to direct traffic along accessible routes.



To make the transition from main conference area to workshop rooms easier, arrange to have all workshop breakout rooms close to each other (i.e., on the same floor and/or next door to each other). Conducting the workshops in adjacent rooms saves time between breakout sessions. A schedule of the day's activities should be placed at the registration table and at strategic points between the workshop breakout rooms and by elevators and stairs to be used by conference participants. Make certain that the directions to the men's and ladies rest rooms are prominently marked.



*Tip Alert: A Planning Team member should travel different routes to and through the conference site to identify the locations where signs should be posted to assist conference participants to locate sites. The signs should say **Catch the Wave** and with an arrow pointing in the right direction.*

## CHAPTER 2 - CATCH THE WAVE EVENT

### ***CATCH THE WAVE!***

The day for ***CATCH THE WAVE*** has arrived! The Planning Team should anticipate that some participants might arrive as early as half-hour to one hour before the scheduled start of the conference.

Before conference participants start arriving, a designated member of the Planning Team should complete the following tasks:

- Put up signs directing the conference participants towards the registration desk/area.
- Walk through the workshop breakout rooms and make sure they are set up and ready to go (make sure the doors are open, a schedule of events for that room is posted, and audio/visual equipment is in place.
- Set up the registration desk with check-in sheets and conference packets.



*Tip Alert: Assigning responsibilities for different tasks to Planning Team members is recommended.*

### **Registration**

The registration area is the first point of contact for conference participants. Most of the participants will have pre-registered so the primary function for this area will be to check in registered participants, hand out conference materials, and direct participants to the initial conference activity. Have the check in point located near the primary entrance and post signs or arrows to indicate that this is the starting point. Be sure to allow ample room at the registration area to accommodate wheelchairs, assistants, etc. Separate registration areas for groups/individuals is recommended if the anticipated attendance is expected to be high.



Ensure that there is adequate staff on hand to assist with the registration process. Staff should be available to greet attendees and answer questions. Be aware that not everyone will arrive prior to the time for the initial event and be sure that there are staff available to assist these later arrivals

### **Name Tags**

Name tags can be used in a variety of ways:

- to identify conference staff;
- to distinguish presenters;
- at lunchtime, to identify conference participants who are "eligible" for lunch.

Name tags for each pre-registered participant can be prepared before the conference. Name tags will need to be prepared by a Planning Team member or by the participant at the time of registration for those who did not pre-register. If wearing a badge is a requirement for entrance to *Catch the Wave*, or if it is necessary to gain access to refreshments, position staff to enforce this policy.

### **Conference Materials**

The packet that participants receive when they attend *Catch the Wave* is more than a keepsake of the conference since it will contain information and resources that they will want to refer to in the future. Conference Packets should include the following materials:

- Name Tag (pre-made or blank)
- Welcome Letter
- An agenda for the conference
- 3 x 5 cards to write down questions for speakers
- Breakout Session Directory (identify where sessions occur with information on room location with map if needed)
- Descriptions of breakout sessions
- Handouts for general and breakout sessions
- List of organizations or programs participating in the Information Fair with contact names, addresses, and phone numbers.

Handouts can enhance any presentation. It is suggested that all *Catch the Wave* handouts be included in the conference packets. At the different sessions, the presenter can request the participants to pull the appropriate handout out of the packet. The handouts should contain all information included in the workshop.

Request that presenters provide a master copy of their handouts prior to the conference to include them in the conference packets. Participants will have a copy of all handouts, even from the sessions they were not able to attend. If an information fair is part of the program, students will use the conference packet to gather resource materials.





***TIP:** One of the primary reasons for this event is to connect students, their families, and educators with post-secondary settings. It is correct to assume that there will be language and terms unfamiliar to conference participants and a list of potentially unfamiliar words and concepts with definitions and explanations will be appreciated.*

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR PREPARING MATERIALS**

1. Place all materials in a folder. Loose items are likely to be lost during the conference or at a workshop.
2. Include a welcome letter. The letter should describe what participants should expect during the day.
3. If any of the conference materials contain forms which participants are likely to copy or modify for their own use, provide a duplicate. Notes can be made on the handout, and the other copy can be used as a master for reproduction. This is especially useful for educators.
4. Provide participants with copies of all visuals used throughout the conference. Having a copy of visuals will help participants follow the presentation even if they are seated in the back of the room. It also provides a convenient way to remember points made during the program.
5. Include the presenter's name, address, and phone number.
6. Consider including other information that conference participants may appreciate:
  - a checklist or "To Do" list that participants can use.
  - a summary of key points that will be covered.
  - reprints of articles or other information that may be useful to students, their families or educators.

A Breakout Room Directory (see sample in the Appendix, Page 12) is useful to assist conference participants to locate the appropriate room(s).

The conference packets should be sorted before conference day to assist with the registration process. Packets can be sorted by school district. Each stack of packets can be bundled with rubber bands. For easy identification the school or district name can be prominently displayed at the top of each bundle.

### **Presenters/Speakers**

One of the Planning Team members should be available to greet the conference presenters. This is even more important if the speaker is unfamiliar with the event location. A briefing by the Planning Team member should include the following types of information:

- actual attendance and composition of the audience;
- an introduction to other speakers/presenters;
- an introduction to person who will introduce the speaker (if the Planning Team decides to use this method);
- information on room location and the location of presentation aids (charts, props, extra tables) that are available.





Planning Team members should be available to help the speakers set up their audio-visual aids, if necessary.



*Tip: Speaker Introductions*

*It is said that the first rule in introducing a speaker is to never leave anything to chance. If the Planning Team has opted to use a keynote speaker for **Catch the Wave**, the following suggestions should be considered.*

- *Script the introduction of the speaker.*
- *Make certain to have the proper pronunciation of the speaker's name.*
- *It is appropriate that the person who introduced the speaker lead the applause before and after the presentation.*

**Evaluation of *Catch the Wave***

One of the primary goals of ***Catch the Wave*** is to enable students to evaluate whether post-secondary education is a viable and realistic option. Additionally, ***Catch the Wave*** provides information to families and educators on how best to prepare students with disabilities for success in post-secondary education. It is critically important that all participants complete an evaluation of the conference. Evaluations are useful in planning for future events. Additionally, an evaluation allows the conference organizers to assess changes in awareness and understanding.

Possible evaluation questions should emphasize program quality, organization, conference format, reactions on location and luncheon. These items are useful when planning future events. The conference evaluation should be no longer than one side of a standard sheet of paper. Questions should be brief, requiring check marks or circles. Inquire as to what participants would like to see added, deleted, or changed for the next conference. Leave room toward the end of the evaluation sheet for the participant to add comments and suggestions.

Individual breakout session evaluations will provide valuable feedback on the content and quality of a presentation. A review of all of this information will provide the Planning Team with information on how to improve ***Catch the Wave***. Sample evaluations are located in the Appendix, pages 16-20.

Participants should complete their overall conference evaluation at the end of the day. Request that participants leave their completed evaluations in the boxes placed at the exits as they leave the conference.

**Closing Remarks**



It is important to recognize everybody's contribution to the success of the conference. During closing remarks, ask the conference audience for a round of applause to thank conference organizers. Acknowledge the many resources that went into producing a successful conference:

- the host site
- site facilities
- food or meal services
- presenters
- student panel participants
- resource fair participants
- tour guides
- registration desk personnel



## CHAPTER 3 - FOLLOW UP ACTIVITIES

**Catch the Wave** is over, and it was an overwhelming success!

Now is the time to complete certain responsibilities and take steps to make the next conference easier.

### **Accounting Activities**

Post-conference accounting could include items such as paying invoices for expenses incurred in connection with the conference and billing for any uncollected registration fees. It may be helpful to create a spreadsheet detailing conference income and expenses.

As soon as possible after the conference, pay:

- invoices received from vendors who provided services for the conference, such as food service or equipment rental.
- anyone with whom an agreement of payment was arranged for their participation in the conference, such as interpreter fees.

Although it may have been stated that no walk-in or same day registrations would be accepted, this situation may still have come up on conference day. If exceptions were made, bill those who attended the conference but had not paid. At this time, also invoice school districts that registered with a purchase order.

### **Thank You Letters**

The Planning Team may wish to designate a member to write letters of appreciation to the student panel participants, breakout session presenters, and to the host site contact. Acknowledge their contribution, especially if they donated their time and effort to this event. Workshop presenters may be interested in the results of the evaluation requested at the conclusion of their session. This information may be included in the thank-you letter. Sample thank you letters are located on pages 21-22 in the Appendix.

### **Post Conference Meeting**

The Planning Team should meet for one last time following the conference. This should occur as soon after the event as possible. The meeting should focus on reviewing the information collected through the evaluation process and a discussion of the event. A team member should record these observations and recommendations for use in planning future events. The team may wish to review and discuss the "statistics" of the conference such as number of participants broken down by participant category - student, parent, or educator. Student participants should also be reviewed according to school and grade level, number of pre-registered participants versus any same day registrations; and an actual per participant cost should be determined.

## APPENDIX



# Pre-Conference Planning Worksheet

## **Three-Four Months Prior to Conference**

- ☐ Conference Planning Team meets.
- ☐ Select a Team Leader.
- ☐ Identify a team member to coordinate registration activities.
- ☐ Determine conference location
- ☐ Tour conference site (use site planning checklist and site accessibility checklist.)
- ☐ Determine conference date, time, and location on the campus.
- ☐ Discuss budget, including anticipated expenses.
- ☐ Determine registration fee (suggested fee is \$3-\$5 per participant.)
- ☐ Construct preliminary budget spreadsheet.
- ☐ Determine menu for lunch. Discuss any additional food service needs.
- ☐ Discuss marketing of conference.
- ☐ Discuss speaker/panelist needs.
- ☐ Contact prospective speakers/panelists
- ☐ Discuss/review promotional brochure

## **Two Months Prior to Conference**

- ☐ Send letter of confirmation to speakers and panelists. Provide date to submit master handouts for copying.
- ☐ Finalize promotional brochure or other marketing materials and print.
- ☐ Mail brochure or promotional materials to target audience.
- ☐ Start registration database.
- ☐ Contact food facility for meal selection and prices.

## **One Month Prior to Conference**

- ☐ Compile registrations
- ☐ Assign rooms to panelists/speakers
- ☐ Develop draft of room directory
- ☐ Reproduce materials
- ☐ Develop signs with room numbers, time, and descriptions

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## **One Week Prior to Conference**

- ☐ Produce a master registration list (Determine total number of registered participants)
- ☐ Confirm final meal/food count to food vendors
- ☐ Assemble conference information packets



- ☐ Make up name badges
- ☐ Produce name roster by school/district
- ☐ Re-confirm equipment needs
- ☐ Complete any telephone instructions to presenters or to contact person for any group registrations
- ☐ Prepare any evaluation forms

**Day before Conference (or early on the day of the conference)**

- ☐ Post signs and set up any notifications at site
- ☐ Set up registration table
- ☐ Check on set up or set up large group conference room
- ☐ Check on set up or set up workshop breakout rooms
- ☐ Confirm food arrangements

**Post Conference Activities**

- ☐ Send thank you letters to:
  - Conference site contacts
  - Speakers
  - Panelists
- ☐ Compile evaluation results
- ☐ Process any vouchers or bills associated with event
- ☐ Conduct computation of attendance and costs
- ☐ Update mailing list for future conferences

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## Conference Site Checklist

Date:  
Time:  
Site:  
Audience:



## Preview of Conference Site:

### **LOCATION:**

- \_\_\_ Obtain a campus map showing directions to proposed conference site.
- \_\_\_ Complete site accessibility checklist.

### **MEAL SERVICE:**

- \_\_\_ Determine who to contact - obtain name and number
- \_\_\_ Obtain menu and price information.

### **FACILITIES:**

- \_\_\_ Determine who to contact to arrange for room usage - obtain name and number.
- \_\_\_ Obtain facilities contract and any insurance requirements, if needed.
- \_\_\_ Large meeting room preview
  - Will it accommodate size of group?
  - Room charge?
  - Can room be arranged to accommodate needs of conference?
- \_\_\_ Breakout rooms
  - Will the rooms hold at least 35 people
  - Are the rooms in close proximity to large group meeting room?
- \_\_\_ Determine parking space availability



# Site Accessibility Checklist

## **PARKING, WALKS, AND RAMPS**

- \_\_\_ Are there parking space for persons with disabilities clearly identified by the international access symbol?
- \_\_\_ Are there an adequate number of accessible parking spaces?
- \_\_\_ Are those spaces located on an accessible route to the conference site?
- \_\_\_ Are the surfaces from reserved parking areas to the conference entrance relatively non-slip and stable under all weather conditions?

## **BUILDING ENTRANCES, CORRIDORS, AND STAIRS**

- \_\_\_ Is the main entrance accessible with an opening of at least 32"?
- \_\_\_ Are the handles, pulls, latches, locks and other operating devices on accessibly doors easily grasped, and can they be operated with a closed fist?
- \_\_\_ Do doors have the "automatic open" option?
- \_\_\_ Do hallways and corridors between rooms have a clearance of at least 36" to allow a wheelchair to pass?

## **ELEVATORS**

- \_\_\_ Are any floors to be used at the conference not accessible by elevator?
- \_\_\_ Does the elevator have a visual and/or audible signal to indicate direction of travel (sound once for up, twice for down)?
- \_\_\_ Are elevator call buttons located at least 42" above the floor with Braille floor designations on the exterior and interior of the elevator?
- \_\_\_ Does the elevator have an inside dimension of at least 54" x 68" and a door opening of 36"?

## **CONFERENCE SITE**

- \_\_\_ Is the meeting room centrally located for persons with mobility limitations?
- \_\_\_ Is there enough spacing between tables?
- \_\_\_ Are meeting room floors level and non-slip?
- \_\_\_ Is the lighting non-glare, non-blinking, and non-reflecting?
- \_\_\_ Is there background noise present - such as an air conditioning blower, kitchen noise, etc.
- \_\_\_ If needed, is there a ramp for access to the stage or podium?
- \_\_\_ If needed, is there a hand-held microphone available.

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## **CAFETERIA/EATING AREA**

- \_\_\_ Are tables wheelchair-accessibly (at least 27" clearance under the table and 30" in width)?
- \_\_\_ Are cafeteria lines accessibly (at least 35" wide with adequate turning space at corners)?



## **PUBLIC REST ROOMS**

- \_\_\_ Are the accessible restrooms located within a reasonable distance of conference activities?
- \_\_\_ Do restroom entrances have an opening of at least 32" wide.
- \_\_\_ Is there at least one restroom stall with an opening of 32"?
- \_\_\_ Are there grab bars in that stall?
- \_\_\_ Is there a clear space in front of the sink for approach of a wheelchair?

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## **CATCH THE WAVE**

A Conference for High School Students with disabilities,  
their families, and Educators on  
planning for post-secondary training.  
(host site name)





(Date of conference)

## CONFERENCE AGENDA

8:30 AM - 9:00 AM	Registration with continental breakfast
9:00 AM - 10:00 AM	Welcome and Opening Remarks Student Panel or Keynote Speaker
10:00 - 10:10 AM	Break
10:10 AM - 11:00 AM	Breakout Session I
11:00 AM - 11:10 AM	Break
11:10 AM - 12:00 PM	Breakout Session II
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM	Lunch with Information Fair
1:00 PM - 1:50 PM	Breakout Session III
1:50 PM - 2:00 PM	Break
2:00 PM - 2:30 PM	Closing Remarks and Conference Evaluation

presented by SD Transition Project  
and (host site name)

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## Information Fair

Explore post-secondary options and planning information during the lunch break by visiting the tables hosted by representatives from:

● Technical Institutes



- State/Private Universities and Colleges
- Adult Service Providers
- Financial Aid
- Technology Information

The following schools and services are represented at this year's conference:

Technical Institute

University

Adult Service Providers

Financial Aid

Technology Information

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## **BREAKOUT SESSION DESCRIPTIONS - STUDENTS**

*Catch the Wave* offers three opportunities for breakout sessions. It is recommended that each session be offered more than once.



Student targeted sessions include:

### **Know Yourself**

One of the most critical issues for success at a post-secondary level is for students to be able to identify and explain their disability. This session will focus on providing information that will assist students in being able to describe how their disability affects learning and what are the accommodations needed that will provide access to the educational environment.

### **Speak Out**

Too often students feel powerless, unable and sometimes unwilling to participate in the planning decisions that affect their lives. This session will focus on providing students with the information and resources that will assist them in speaking for themselves.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation**

Information will be provided on eligibility requirements and the application procedure for services. The range of services that can be provided to students will also be discussed.

### **Financial Aid**

Participants will receive information on available financial aid resources and on the necessary documentation and timelines for application. Questions will be addressed on the financial aid process.

### **Preparing for College and Planning for Your Future**

This session will address setting goals, organizational skills, study skills, time management, and common challenges for all students with disabilities.

### **Future Trends - Preparing for Job Opportunities**

Future occupational trends will be presented along with information on the post-secondary training and education necessary to be competitive in the job market.

### **Tour of College Campus**

Conference participants will have the opportunity to take a guided tour of the campus.

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### **Legal Rights and Responsibilities**

Participants will hear about the federal and state laws that protect the rights of students with disabilities in post-secondary education. In addition, the changing role and responsibilities of the student will be discussed.

### **Strategies and Accommodations for Success**

Participants will hear about the academic strategies students with disabilities can utilize in the post-secondary education setting. Accommodations and technology for various disabilities will also be discussed.



### **Shopping for a Career and a College**

This session will address some of the questions students should explore in considering career options. Resources for career decision making will also be reviewed. Participants will also be guided through the process of searching for a "best match" in post-secondary institutions.

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## **BREAKOUT SESSIONS - PARENTS/EDUCATORS**

Sessions for Parents/Educators could include:

### **The Changing Role of the Parent/Family**

The role of the parent/family changes from advocate to mentor as the student transitions to and through post-secondary education. Parents will be provided with suggestions and strategies for their changing role.

### **Financial Aid**

Parents will receive information on available financial aid resources and their role in the process. Information on the documentation and timelines for application will be provided. Questions will be addressed on the financial aid process.

**Vocational Rehabilitation**

Information will be provided on eligibility requirements and the application procedure for services. The range of services that can be provided to students will also be discussed.

**Tour of College Campus**

Conference participants will have the opportunity to take a guided tour of the campus.

**Legal Rights and Responsibilities**

Parents will hear about the federal and state laws that protect the rights of students with disabilities in post-secondary education. An explanation of the changes in the responsibilities and roles of the student as they leave high school will be provided.

**What Teachers Need to Know - Effective Post-Secondary Transition Planning**

This session will provide educators of the specific preparation necessary for a seamless transition for students moving from high school into the post-secondary arena.

# Confirmation Letter - Workshop Presenters



Date

Name Address

Dear

I am writing to confirm your plans to participate in the student conference entitled "Catch the Wave". The conference is scheduled for (day and date)at (conference site). Below is a confirmation of your topic and the time(s) we have you scheduled.

Workshop Presentation:

Topic: Time:

Each workshop is scheduled to be ( ) minutes in length. Please allow the last five minutes for participants to complete a brief workshop evaluation form that we will be providing.

Most conference participants prefer to participate in interactive presentations. We recommend that you consider including a few key discussion questions or any other interactive approach to your material. Another recommendation you may consider is to include a student with a disability as a co-presenter.

We would like to include all conference session handouts in the packets of each conference participant. If you will be including handouts in your presentation, please mail a copy of each handout to us as soon as possible(or provide a mail by date). If you will be including a brochure as a handout, please consider mailing them to us as well. We will return any unused brochures on the day of the conference.

Please call me at (telephone number) by (date) if you need to have specific audio-visual equipment. We welcome you to participate in the entire conference and would like to provide lunch. If you will be staying for lunch, please RSVP with me by (date) Enclosed you will find a map to (conference site) and an agenda.

Please call me at the number listed above if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you again for your interest and commitment to this student conference.

Sincerely

# Confirmation Letter - Information Fair Presenter



Date

Name Address

Dear

I am writing to confirm your plans to participate in the student conference entitled "Catch the Wave". The conference is scheduled for (day and date) at (conference site). Below is a confirmation of your topic and the scheduled time of the information fair.

Information Fair

Topic: (insert agency, service, or school represented)

Time:

We will have approximately (# of tables/booths) agencies or service providers represented at the information fair. You may want to consider arriving at (time) to ensure adequate time to set up your station.

We welcome you to participate in the entire conference and would like to provide lunch. If you will be staying for lunch, please RSVP with me at (telephone number) by (date).

Enclosed you will find a map to (conference site) and a workshop agenda.

Please call me at the number listed above if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you again for your interest and commitment to this conference.

Sincerely

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# Confirmation Letter - Student Panel Participant



Date

Name Address

Dear

I am delighted you have agreed to speak on the student panel at "Catch the Wave," a conference for high school students with disabilities, their families, and educators. Catch the Wave is scheduled for (date) at (conference site). The student panel is scheduled to take place from (times), and will be presented (location of presentation). Please arrive by (time) and check in with me (or provide the name of a team member responsible for this). There will be a total of (total number of panel participants) students on the panel.

You may be wondering what to say while you are on the panel and what information in particular would be helpful for the conference participants. Included in this packet is a list of statements identified as areas of interest or concern by high school students who are considering attending a post-secondary school following graduation. You may want to use this as a reference or guideline when making your panel presentation.

Enclosed you will find a map to the conference site, a campus map, and an agenda. You are welcome to participate in the entire conference. If you plan to be there for lunch, please RSVP with me by calling (telephone number) before (date).

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me (or contact name, if different). Thank you again for your interest and commitment to participate in the student panel.

Sincerely

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## **Dear Student Panel Participant:**

The statements listed below are provided as suggestions or guidelines for you to consider when presenting on the student panel. The purpose of the panel is to give conference participants an idea





of the challenges and successes you have experienced as a student at a post-secondary school. Each panelist will have a brief time to talk to the audience. After each panel member has had the opportunity to talk, the audience may ask questions of the panel members.

Explain your disability and **how it impacts** your learning.

Explain your learning strengths and **how you use your strengths** to compensate for your disability.

Describe what you would have **done differently in high school** to be better prepared for college.

Specify the kind of **support services** you use now.

Describe how professors/instructors have reacted to **your requests for accommodations**.

Describe what is or has been the **most difficult aspect or biggest challenge** of attending a technical institute/university and how you dealt with it.

Explain what you have **found to be the most helpful** for you in regards to being a successful student. This may be certain skills you have or specific services you receive or a combination of both.

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## Sample Registration Confirmation Letter

Date

Name

School/District

Address

City, State, Zip

Dear



Thank you for registering for "Catch the Wave", which will be held on (date) at (campus name and address). This letter confirms registration for (# adults/# students).

I am enclosing information, which will assist you in planning your day at the conference. The enclosed agenda lists the different presentations scheduled for the conference. Enclosed you will also find a map to (campus name), as well as a map of the campus that will direct you to the appropriate parking lot and to the conference site at the (conference site). Please note that the conference begins at ( ) AM, please arrive and check-in promptly.

If you need any accommodation(s) for a disability, please call me at \_\_\_\_\_ before (date) to allow ample time to make the necessary arrangements.

We look forward to seeing you at "Catch the Wave".

Sincerely

Name  
Title

Enclose: Conference agenda  
Descriptions of breakout sessions  
Campus Map - with parking indicated  
Release/field trip permission - if appropriate

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## Catch the Wave Student Evaluation

Please complete and turn in this form after the conference.

Circle the word or words that best describes how you feel about the statement. Keep in mind that the term post-secondary can refer to a technical institute or a four-year college or university.

1. After high school I will pursue post-secondary education.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

2. I know what types of post-secondary programs are available.



Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

3. I know how to get financial assistance for post-secondary programs.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

4. I can be successful in a post-secondary program.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

5. My disability will get in the way of my being successful in post-secondary education.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

6. I will ask for support services and/or accommodations in order to be successful in a college program.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

7. At this conference, I learned new information that will help me prepare for a post-secondary education.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

8. After this conference, I am more likely to attend a post-secondary program.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

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9. What I liked best about this day:

10. What I would suggest to improve this conference:

11. My current grade level is: 8    9    10    11    12

My age is:

Thank you for coming to the Student Conference!



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## **Catch the Wave - Parent/Educator Evaluation**

Circle the word or words that best describe how you feel about the statement. Keep in mind that the term "post-secondary education" can refer to a technical institute or a four-year college or university.

1. It is important that post-secondary education and training goals are addressed on a student's Individual Education Plans (IEP).

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

2. I know what post-secondary options and support services are available for students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree



3. It is important that I help my son/daughter/student learn how to advocate for the supports and accommodations that they will need to be successful in post-secondary education.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

4. I know what information and skills a student needs to reach his/her post-secondary education goals.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

5. I have adequate knowledge of the financial aid process related to post-secondary education.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

6. I know how the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) affects students with disabilities at the post-secondary education level.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

7. I will work with other professionals (such as teachers, school counselors, disability services counselors, and adult service agencies like VR, DSB, etc.), to plan for and prepare my son/daughter/student(s) for post-secondary education.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

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8. My son/daughter/student(s) can be successful in a post-secondary education program.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

9. Having a disability will inhibit my son/daughter/student(s) from reaching post-secondary educational goals.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

10. Participation in this conference may increase the likelihood that my son/daughter/student(s) will attend post-secondary education.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

11. What I liked best about this day:

12. What I would suggest to improve this conference:



13. Did you receive the mailing for this conference in a timely fashion? If not, what can we do differently?

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## Breakout Sessions Evaluation

(presenter's name and topic)

What did you learn during this session?

What questions do you still have on this topic?

Any suggestions for future presentations?

Are you a: Student; Teacher; Parent



## Sample Presenter Thank You Letter

Date

Name

Address

Dear

The Catch the Wave conference was a great success! We had (#) registered participants representing (#) high schools from (#) school districts. The overall response to the conference was enthusiastically positive! We would like to extend our appreciation to you for your contribution in making this conference such a success. Your efforts assisted in making this a worthwhile and enriching experience for students, parents and educators.

Several presenters have expressed an interest in seeing the results of the workshop evaluations for their particular presentation. In response to this interest, a summary of your workshop's evaluation has been enclosed. I hope you find this information beneficial.

If you have any feedback concerning your experience at the conference, we welcome hearing from you. Thank you again for your contribution to the success of this student conference.

Sincerely





## Sample Thank You Letter – Student Panel Participants

Date

Name  
Address

Dear

Catch the Wave was a great success! We had (#) registered participants representing (#) secondary schools from (#) school districts. Students, teachers and parents offered valuable feedback on the conference and the overall response was enthusiastically positive! We would like to extend our appreciation to you for your contribution in making this conference such a success. The student panel received very positive comments from the conference participants.

If you have any feedback concerning your experience at the conference, we welcome hearing from you. We learn from each conference experience and are committed to making the next conference even better!

Sincerely